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ABSTRACT

The speaker presents his notion about reconceptualizing the function of supervision and the role of supervisors in a way that fits the needs of teachers, supervisors, and schools. This new approach conceives of the function of supervisors as interpersonal intervention and the role of the supervisor as that of interpersonal interventionist--a person whose job requires that he intrude in particular ways into a teacher's personal and technical realm to achieve certain ends or products. To the most typical end of supervision--improved quality of instruction--are added the personal and professional growth of teachers and the personal and professional growth of supervisors. Three primary tasks derive from the concept of the intervener role. The first is the generation of valid information associated with problems. The second is to maintain the client's system's discreteness and autonomy, which emphasizes the need for the teacher to make free, informed choices. The third is concerned with the development of the client's internal commitment to the choices made; if commitment is low, the chances of lasting learning and change resulting from the intervention are minimal. (Author/IRT)

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SUPERVISION AS INTERPERSONAL INTERVENTION[1]

by Arthur Blumberg

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By design or otherwise, it seems to me conceptually appropriate that the three papers that constitute this symposium have been brought together at one time. They fit neatly into the model of organizational or system analysis that has been proposed by Leavitt (1965). This model suggests a comprehensive analysis of a human system needs to focus on the interaction among the structural, technological, and human factors associated with that system as they affect and are affected by the task or goal. Packard's paper deals with structural factors; Eisner's with elements of technology; and this one, to use McGregor's (1960) term, with "the human side of the enterprise." Hopefully, and it will be no easy task, from his vantage point as critiquer, Holeman will be able to lend some holistic sense to it all.

It seems unnecessary, at this point, to present detailed documentation of the manner in which the character of supervisor-teacher interaction, the character of supervisory behavioral styles, and the quality of supervisor-teacher interpersonal relationships is related to the satisfaction and productivity that teachers find in their supervision. This has been reported in some depth in a previous publication (Blumberg, 1973). Suffice it to say that, in a very pervasive manner, the results of research on supervisory behavioral styles in the schools support the notion that the more open, collaborative and non-defensive is the interpersonal climate created by the supervisor the more teachers are satisfied with their supervision and feel that it is productive for them. This is hardly a surprising finding. What is surprising and disturbing is to discover the extremely low incidence with which such climates seem to occur. For example, in the only study of its kind of which I am aware (Blumberg and Cusick, 1970), fifty separate supervisor-teacher tape-recorded conferences were analyzed. The total conference time involved was over eleven hours. The results indicated that supervisors spent only .04 per cent of their talking time (1.2 minutes out of five hours) asking teachers about how they would go about solving a classroom problem. Further, teachers spent only .06 per cent of their talking time (2.2 minutes out of 6 hours) asking the supervisor any kind of question at all. Clearly, one cannot generalize these results to all supervisory situations. Nevertheless, they continue to be confirmed in my own experience

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through casual and sometimes unobtrusive observation. Further, and on a more impressionistic level, if one listens to these tapes one is forced to raise the question whether or not what currently transpires in many, perhaps most, cases in the name of supervision is not largely ritualistic, deals with a great deal of trivia, and may be considered, at best, non-harmful. If, for example, you think that the time is past when a principal's concern with what a teacher did in a classroom was confined to whether or not the shades are drawn evenly you are mistaken. Just such a case was reported to me recently.

My purpose here, however, is not to criticize or ridicule. Rather, it is to share with you a developing notion I have about reconceptualizing the function of supervision and the role of supervisors in a way I think fits the needs of teachers, supervisors, and schools - even if these needs are presently unrecognized. What I have in mind is to conceive of the function of supervision as <u>interpersonal intervention</u> and the role of the supervisor as that of <u>interpersonal interventionist</u>: as a person whose job requires that he/she intrude in particular ways into a teacher's personal and technical system to achieve certain ends or products. The product most typically associated with supervision in the schools is an improved quality of instruction in classrooms. I add two additional products to be sought: the personal and professional growth of teachers and the personal and professional growth of supervisors. Few people in education or the community at large, I suspect, would argue with the first, improving the quality of instruction, as the essence of supervision. By the same token, I hunch that many would disagree with my position on the other two products, the mutual growth of supervisor and teacher, as critical to the effective implementation of help to the teacher. Nonethe less, it seems clear to me that if the function of supervision as it is presently conceived in the schools is to grow beyond what appears to be a relatively devalued function by great numbers of teachers to one that is held in high

esteem, it must ultimately include a concern with the potential mutual growth aspect of the relationship.[2]

I am well aware that the normative structure of schools and teachers does not support in any strong way the position I take, though there is some evidence of concern by individual teachers. For example, Gwynn (1960, p. 76) reports a continuing study of the ways in which both pre-service and in-service teachers thought supervisors could be of help to them. Of the twenty-four "ways in which a supervisor can help", one of them was categorized "with my problems- professional, community, social." It was ranked fifth and received, curiously, more support from experienced teachers than from pre-service or first year teachers. Though Gwynn's results may be somewhat out-of-date, it is possible that teachers sense and need something of which the system is unaware. For example, I frequently ask my students when was the last time their supervisor (or principal) engaged them in a discussion of their personal or career goals with the object of being helpful to them. It is only the rare case where, in a class of thirty-five or so, more than one or two hands are raised affirmatively. I presume it would be the height of folly to ask supervisors the companion question: "When was the last time you sought help from teachers concerning problems you might have with your own personal and professional development?"

As I interpret the current concerns with competency based supervision (Harris and King, 1974) and clinical supervision, neither of them approach the problem of supervision in the schools from the perspective that I am suggesting. By and large, both of these approaches appear to give most emphasis to the curricular, methodological or technological aspects of teaching. There appears,

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[2]My colleague, Professor William Greenfield, offered the following comment here on reading a draft of this manuscript. His view is more skeptical than mine, thus, perhaps worthwhile to bear in mind. "Perhaps the supervisory system ought to be scrapped altogether. What I see nobody doing is examining the basic system assumptions upon which the historical function of supervision rests; namely, that teachers are not capable, responsible persons concerned with their own personal and on-the-job competence. It seems that the intrusion of supervisors only adds to an already well-established 'dependence mentality' among teachers."

in both of them, to be little concern with the nature and quality of the human relationship that exists between supervisor and teacher. For example, the Harris and King project referred to above proposes three major competency "domains" that are central to supervision: problem-solving, human relations, and job-task. Within these domains there have been specified eleven basic competencies, and of this number only one may be properly categorized as focussing on the interpersonal system of the supervisor and teacher. Further, there are seventy-five separate functions connected with the domains out of which three appear to bear on supervisor-teacher interaction and relationships.

I have no comparable data to report relative to clinical supervision. I do, however, have anecdotal reports from students of mine who are involved in student teaching supervision with a "clinical" model. The gist of these anecdotes is that the supervisors, at least, feel constrained by the structure of the model and feel it is a mechanical, rather ritualistic, "going through the paces" experience. As one student supervisor reported, "I am made to feel that I am dealing with things and techniques, not people." There is no question, of course, that the learning and testing of different teaching methodologies and techniques is important. The question at root, in my judgement, concerns the nature of the relationships and subsequent transactions that occur between supervisor and teacher as the methodologies and techniques are learned. Put into research design terms, the issue involves the character of the process variables that mediates supervisor-teacher interaction.

In addition, but not at all an afterthought, the question also involves the substance of the supervisory transaction that goes beyond issues of methodology or classroom control, for example. To pursue this point further, it is instructive to learn about positions taken in another helping profession toward the nature and substance of the supervisory relationship. In Coping With Conflict (Mueller and Kell, 1972), a book about the supervision of psychotherapists and counselors, one finds some ideas which are germane at this point, if only to hold up an image of what might be relevant to supervision in the schools. The following quotations, all from Mueller and Kell, convey the flavor of the argument.[3]

[3] I have taken the liberty of substituting, in the parantheses, more educationally relevent terms than the ones that were used originally by Mueller and Kell. The original reads 'clients' instead of (students), "therapist" instead of (teacher), and therapeutic" instead of (good teaching).

> (Students) have a way of squirming out of casebooks. As they come alive, ... (students) may shed their inhibitions... causing ... (the teacher) anxious moments (p. 3).
>
> Learning <u>what</u> is (good teaching) is an insufficient goal of supervision unless both parties recognize that a major part of what is (good teaching) is the way in which the (teacher) uses himself (p. 5).
>
> So long as the supervisor and (teacher) focus their attention solely on the (students') behavior and assume that managing that source of anxiety (i.e., the (teachers') is a sufficient goal of supervision, the process of supervision will remain didactic at best (p. 6).
>
> If the supervisory relationship is to develop along the lines we propose ... then that relationship must be founded in trust, openness, warmth, and honest collaboration. The essence of supervisory relationships is no different from that of any significant human relationship and unless that common essence (i.e., trust, openness, warmth, and honest collaboration), exists the supervisory relationship will not be actuated (pp. 7-8).

These are "heavy" statements, to use a counter-culture term that connotes an idea of major significance. They imply a concept of supervision and supervisor-teacher relationships which, if transferred into the context of public education, goes far beyond what is currently the experience and training of most supervisors. The suggestions implicit in them for a more fulfilling and productive function of supervision in the schools may be restated in the following way:

1. An appropriate focus of at least some part of the supervisor-teacher transaction should be on those elements of the classroom situation which tend to induce anxiety into the teacher and the ways in which the teacher deals with that anxiety. This is not to suggest that all teachers are anxious. It is, however, to make the point that there are conditions in every classroom that produce teacher anxiety, that sometimes it is overwhelming thus immobilizing, and that an extremely important function of supervision is to help the teacher understand its source and work with it -- and the supervisor's as well. That is, one can take the position that much as the classroom may produce anxiety in the teacher so may the supervisory situation produce it for the supervisor. If this statement seems

out-of-context, let me suggest that the reader, in retrospect, examine his own emotionality during the last time he tried to deal with the anxiety of another person.

2. So long as the thrust of supervision is on curricular and methodological matters to the neglect of behavioral matters - those of the teachers in the classroom and of the teachers and supervisors in their interaction with each other - the outcomes of supervision will fall short of its potential. Metaphorically, knowing the words is not a sufficient condition for singing a song. One must also know and be able to sing the music, and want to sing!

3. To the extent that the focus of supervision remains solely on the behavior of students as the source of the teacher's problems, the supervisor's role will be that of a didactic teacher. The suggestion is that as long as problems of teaching exclude the teacher as a person the better are the chances that supervision will be a prescriptive process with slight chance for growth of either the teacher or the supervisor.

4. In order for supervisor-teacher relationships to be growth-producing they need to be seen as significant human relationships, not matter-of-fact ritualistic ones as appears so often to be the case. Indeed, the results of a study conducted several years ago (Blumberg and Amidon, 1968), indicated that the more the supervisory relationship was characterized, behaviorally, by the components of a supportive interpersonal climate (Gibb, 1961), the more productive and important it was from the point of view of the teacher.

5. At some time in the supervisor-teacher relationship, attention needs to be given to the personal and professional growth problems of the teacher, if only to test out whether the teacher is experiencing any such problems. What is not at issue here is that the supervisor be a psycho-therapist or try to play psycho-therapist. What is at issue is the need, as I see it, for the supervisor to convey an authentic "reaching-out" to the teacher as a person.

THE SUPERVISOR AS AN INTERPERSONAL INTERVENTIONIST

If educational supervision is to move in the directions that have been proposed above it is necessary to reconceptualize the role of the supervisor. The change is from a role that may be described primarily as an experienced curricular and methodological technician who (1) comes bearing gifts and/or (2) knows best how things should be done to one where the prerequisite skills and understandings are most closely associated with being able to help another with personal, interpersonal and group problems. In addition, this role requires the supervisor to be a competent pedagogical technician. Further, and underlying this concept, is the notion that the process of learning in supervision, for both teacher and supervisor, is an experiential not a didactic one.

The rationale for conceiving of supervision in this light has been implicit in the comments I have made to this point. Explicitly, the rationale is as follows:

1. At its roots, teaching involves the creation of learning opportunities in an environment whose essential human dynamics are interpersonal and group in nature.

2. Problems that teachers confront and which interfere with the creation of learning opportunities have their roots, again, in the human dynamics of the classroom setting, though they may be conceptualized by the teacher and supervisor in other terms-curricular or methodological, for example. This position does not deny the importance of the curricular or methodological competencies of the teacher. It does suggest, however, that they are the figure and not the ground of the teaching-learning process. Thus, whatever the technological or pedagogical skills of a teacher may be, they become actuated in an environment which is either subtlely or openly characterized by issues of power, motivation, communications, peer group relations, norms, and both intra-group and intergroup conflict.

3. The primary task of the supervisor is to intervene and help the teacher deal with these categories of human problems in the classroom so that the teachers' competencies may be most adequately used.

The concepts of intervention and intervenor have received their most thorough consideration from Argyris (1970). To intervene is to enter an ongoing system of relationships, to come between or among persons, groups....for the purpose of helping them....the system exists independently of the intervenor (Argyris, 1970, p. 15). The intervenor, thus, is separate but related to the client system and

> This view values the client system (i.e., the teacher, for our purposes) as an ongoing, self-responsible unity that has the obligation to be in control over its own destiny. An intervenor, in this view, assists a system to become more effective in problem-solving, decision-making, and decision implementation in such a way that the system can continue to be increasingly effective in these activities and have a decreasing need for the intervenor (Argyris, 1970, p. 16).

Flowing from this concept of the intervenor role are three primary tasks, or processes. The first is the generation of valid information associated with the problem. The second is to maintain the client's system's discreteness and autonomy, thus the necessity for free, informed choice. The third is concerned with the development of the client's internal committment to the choices made, the issue being that if committment is low the chances of lasting learning and change resulting from the intervention are minimal.

We must move down the ladder of Argyris' abstraction to the role of a supervisor as an interpersonal intervenor. It seems to me that the practical implications, hidden beneath a paragraph or two, are very large indeed. (They have to do, minimally, with the knowledge and skills, values and criteria for successful supervisory work.) Within the confines of this paper it will be possible only to sketch out the broad outlines of the problem.

A FUNDAMENTAL PREMISE

First, it is clear that this concept of supervision as interpersonal intervention implies a sort of world view on the part of a supervisor that I believe not to be widely held. It holds that adults, when confronted with appropriate data about themselves and the situation in which they are working, in an atmosphere that acknowledges and accepts their adultness, will make decisions for themselves that are appropriate for them. This is a widely accepted democratic ethic. But let us move from the fluffiness of it to some obvious behavioral and

emotional questions. Can a supervisor "let" a teacher make what seem to be wrong decisions, and respect and support the teacher for making them? If these decisions do indeed turn out to be wrong, can the supervisor refrain from taking an "I told you so" stance? Can a supervisor "let" a teacher fail? Can a supervisor let himself fail? In the face of rejection of the supervisor's help by the teacher, can the supervisor still convey regard for the teacher as a person? How does the supervisor handle his feelings of being rejected? With anger? With acceptance? With empathic understanding of the teacher?

One can go on and on. Ultimately, however, the answers to these and similar questions need to be provided, not by a paper and pencil test, but by the supervisor through behavior. From what I have observed of the behavior of supervisors, most of them would have a great deal of difficulty answering them, behaviorally, in a growth-producing way. They would find difficulty "letting" a teacher make the "wrong" decision, "letting" a teacher or themselves fail, not reacting to rejection with anger and concurrent desires to punish, for example. And they would have these difficulties not because they are bad or stupid people. Rather, the difficulties would arise because most of us have been trained, unwittingly, I suspect, to deal differently with the people for whom we are responsible. That is, our training leads us to understand and accept the premise that organizations are built around the idea that "father (or mother) knows best." And the institutions in which we work tend to support what might be called this "benevolent parent-guilty child" stance. If the difficulties are to be overcome, it means that we must deal with the problem of both individual and organizational change.

THE GENERATION OF VALID INFORMATION

The nature of the information that the supervisor-intervenor gathers in the course of working with a teacher is a matter of deep significance, much more so than meets the casual eye. At issue is the postulate (Tichy, 1975) that the information that an intervenor focusses on in his work is reflective of the assumption he makes about his role and the diagnostic position he takes about the nature of system problems. What information the supervisor focusses on, then, is projective of how that supervisor sees his role and function. Further, the

manner in which the data is collected, collaboratively with the teacher or non-collaboratively, is reflective of the manner in which the supervisor conceives of role relations with the teacher. Thus, if the data collected by the supervisor is concerned only with curricular methodology and is collected without any suggestions from the teacher one might infer that (1) the supervisor sees problems of teaching almost exclusively in terms of method, and (2) the supervisor sees his role vis-a-vis the teacher as a teacher, or, perhaps, as a benevolent-paternalistic problem-solver.

The information-gathering stance of the supervisor as interpersonal intervenor is, first of all, collaborative with the teacher. This stance conveys an egalitarian view of the supervisor-teacher relationship -- one of two professionals analyzing and working on problems together. The nature of the data to be collected ranges over a wide variety of possibilities. Some of these possibilities are: teaching method, the behavioral style of the teacher, the behavior of the students related to the teacher's behavior style, the ways in which the teacher deals with conflict in the classroom, the ways in which the teacher deals with his own anger or warmth, the nature of the relationship between the supervisor and the teacher, the ways in which supervisors and teachers deal with their anger, warmth and dependency towards each other.

The focus of the data collection efforts of the supervisor as interpersonal intervenor, then, is on the wholeness of the supervisor-teacher micro-system and not merely on some disconnected parts of it.

FREE AND INFORMED CHOICE

The underlying principle at work relative to the supervisor-intervenor's efforts to create a situation of free and informed choice on the part of the teacher is to maintain the separateness and autonomy of the teacher as a client-system. Because a condition of free choice implies that the client makes those decisions which are relevant to him, "Free choice makes it possible for the clients to remain responsible for their destiny" (Argyris, 1970, p. 16). There is another consequence of free choice which has already been alluded to. It is that as the supervisor works to create this condition with a teacher the implicit suggestion is that the teacher is

an adult, not a child.[4] This is not merely a platitude. The consequences of an adult-adult relationship are much different than those that may be characterized as parent-child as even people familiar with the popularized versions of Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1964) know. Most importantly for our purposes, the chances of mutual growth for supervisor and teacher are greatly enhanced in the former and only dimly possible in the latter.

INTERNAL COMMITTMENT

The task of developing the internal committment of the teacher to a course of action in the process of supervision is simple on its face, highly complex in action. Again, Argyris (1970, p. 20) spells it out succinctly. When one becomes internally committed to a course of action, thus owning it and feeling responsible for it, "...the individual has reached the point where he is acting on the choice because it fulfills his own needs and sense of responsibility, as well as those of the system."

There are both practical and philosophical consequences to the supervisor-intervenor's concern with working on the development of internal committment on the part of the teacher. Practically, without such committment both the interaction between supervisor and teacher and any "problem-solving" that comes of it takes on a game-like quality. The game is not necessarily of the win-lose variety but it may be one that is implicitly designed to end in a tie with neither side having made any permanent encroachment on the territory of the other. For the supervisor this may mean creating the illusion (perhaps self-deceiving) of being interested in the teacher's problems and of his own involvement in the supervisory process. For the teacher, also engaged in creating illusions, it may mean trying to convey to the supervisor that their work together has been helpful and contains potential for long term growth. The results of this game, if successfully played by both parties, is that each maintains what he sees to be his integrity and no one loses - except, possibly, the youngsters in the classroom.

[4]I take another cue from Professor Greenfield. The process of developing free choice can be conceptualized as intervening in the socialization chain of both supervisor and teacher. This is so because most of the previous, long-term learning experiences of prospective supervisors and teachers (as is the case with most of us) is of the "parent-child" variety when it comes to thinking about superior-subordinate relationships.

Under conditions of internal committment - the teacher to problem solutions and the supervisor-intervenor to the process of helping - it no longer becomes necessary to play the game. Things are simply more honest or they have the potential to be that way.

Philosophically, the development of a condition of internal committment reinforces the adultness of the relationship with its consequent potential for mutual growth. Included in this idea is the "all-rightness" of either the teacher or the supervisor to be openly non-committed to the extent that each can admit feelings of non-productiveness about the situation. This might lead to an open decision either to sever the relationship or seek other avenues by which to pursue it.

In my mind, and by way of summary, the role concept of the supervisor as interpersonal intervenor is a model for adult learning. It focusses not only on the problems of classroom teaching and learning but on the ingredients of the supervisor-teacher relationship that contribute to or detract from the mutual and personal learning of each party in that relationship. It is collaborative and it is also based on the notion (Steele, 1973) that the "facts are friendly". This means not only facts related to the classroom and what goes on it it, but also those facts related to the supervisor-teacher micro-system and what goes on in it. Relative to the latter I take it to be important for the supervisor and teacher to learn to engage in reciprocal feedback and self-disclosure. The teacher needs to be able to disclose feelings of insecurity, for example, as well as tell the supervisor what it is about his behavior that is helpful or unhelpful. And the same holds for the supervisor. Further, the supervisor as interpersonal intervenor concept implies, critically, voluntarism. Intervenors need to be free to choose their clients and clients need to be free to choose their helpers. It makes no more sense to think that any supervisor can help every teacher than it does to think that any teacher can help every student. (This point of view only makes sense if good teaching is seen as a matter of learning to use appropriate methods, and the supervisor has knowledge of these methods while the teacher does not.)

Is there a place within this role concept of supervision that I have proposed for the evaluation function that many supervisors now enact? The answer, I think, is "No" at least as far as the manner in which this function is presently conceived. It seems rather hypocritical and dishonest for a supervisor to engage a teacher in collaborative work and interpersonal effort and then to "fail" that

teacher if these efforts don't pan out productively. After all, it could be that the supervisor failed and not the teacher. What is required is some sort of evaluative arrangement between supervisor and teacher whereby each knows what both success and failure mean - and what are the consequences of each, collaboratively agreed to. The implication of this is that the function of hierarchical, unilateral evaluation of teacher by supervisor will cease to be. If this state of affairs ever came to be my hunch is that there would be no more incompetent teachers in the schools than there are now when evaluation of teachers is done by supervisors who "know a good teacher when they see one."

Having taken the position I have - of advocating a reconceptualization of the supervisor's role from that of the methodological and curriculum specialist to that of an interpersonal intervenor - I must say that I am not optimistic that many individuals or systems will embrace the concept. There are too many forces working in a different direction and perhaps this is just as well. For what I am proposing is, I think, softly radical. It implies a different way of thinking about school system relationships, about what is valued in a system's bureaucracy, about why schools exist, about the ways adults might interact with each other, and about the training and certifying of supervisors. In the fashion of systems analysis, then, because changes in one part of the system affect other parts, a reconceptualization of the supervisory role will probably have minimal effect unless interacting role relationships, value systems, and budgeting priorities are also reconceptualized. Perhaps, though, because the supervisory group in school systems is typically small it provides a manageably-sized group with which to start.

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